

Maritime Usage Licensing and Planning Advisory Directorate Maritime Usage Licence Assessment Report			
To:	John Evans, Director	From:	Dr. Micheál Mac Monagail, Marine Analyst
Date:	29/09/2026	Maritime Usage Licence Application Reference No:	MUL260056
MUL Applicant Name:		Marina Quarter Ltd.	
MUL Applicant Registered Address:		Block C, Maynooth Business Campus, Straffan Road, Maynooth, Kildare, W23F854	
Licence application received:		07/09/2026	
Type of maritime usage activities in accordance with Schedule 7 of the Maritime Area Planning Act 2021:		3. Marine environmental surveys for the purposes of site investigation or in support of an application under Part XXI of the Act of 2000.	
Location of proposed maritime usage:		Intertidal and subtidal areas within Castletown Estuary and Inner Dundalk Bay.	
Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Screening		EIA not required (EIA Screening Form dated 29/09/2026)	
Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening		AA Screening and Determination Report dated 29/09/2026	
Public body consultation:		11/09/26 to 28/09/26	Observations from public bodies received: Two.

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1. Background

Marina Quarter Ltd. (the Applicant) has applied to the Maritime Area Regulatory Authority (MARA) for a Maritime Usage Licence (MUL) to undertake marine environmental surveys for the purposes of site investigation, falling under Schedule 7(3) of the Maritime Area Planning Act 2021 as amended (the MAP Act). The proposed site investigations (SI) are required to characterise the current intertidal and subtidal ecological conditions within the receiving environment prior to the discharge of wastewater from the Haggardstown and Marshes Upper Large-Scale Residential Development.

The proposed SI activities are expected to take 1-2 weeks to complete. However, the Applicant has applied for a four-month MUL to accommodate potential delays arising from weather conditions, tidal constraints and other unforeseen circumstances.

2. Location and Description of the Proposed Maritime Usage

The proposed MUL area lies within the Castletown, Ballymascanlan and Inner Dundalk Bay estuaries, County Louth (see Figure 1). The three estuaries form part of Dundalk Bay, which is a large, shallow bay with extensive intertidal sandflats, mudflats and saltmarsh. The proposed SI activities are temporary marine ecological surveys intended to characterise the existing intertidal and subtidal ecological conditions in the receiving environment prior to the Proposed Development (the Haggardstown and Marshes Upper Large-scale Residential Development) becoming operational.

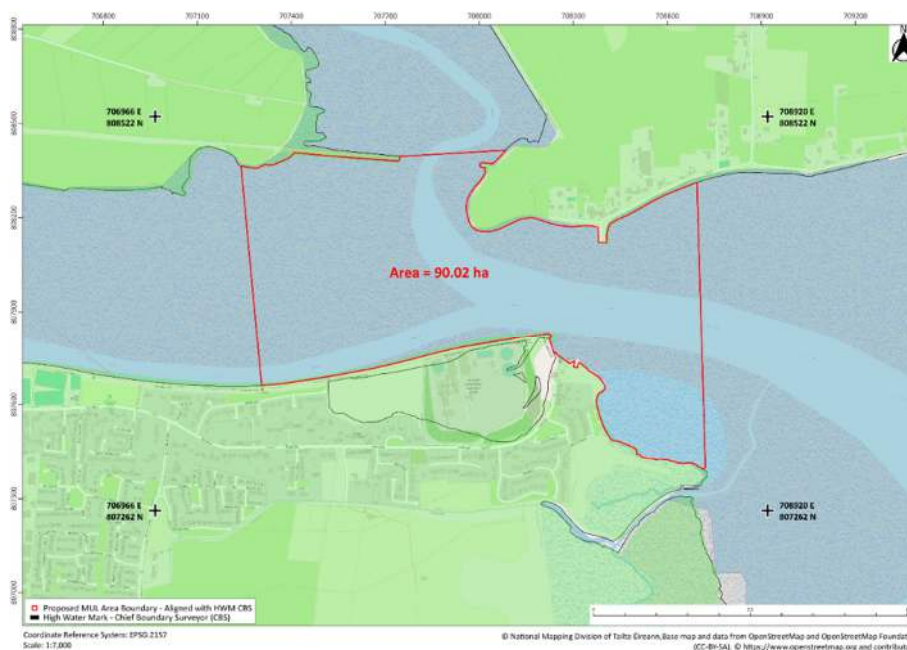


Figure 1: Location of the proposed Maritime Usage Licence area.

All proposed SI activities will occur within Dundalk Bay SAC and Dundalk Bay SPA. The bay is internationally important for wintering waterbirds, regularly supporting an assemblage of more than 20,000 birds.

The proposed SI activities will comprise; Phase I intertidal walkover surveys which will map habitats and biotopes and record physical site characteristics and features of conservation interest. Phase II will consist of a quantitative intertidal survey across four transects, including macrofaunal sampling and sediment characterisation. Additionally, a subtidal survey utilising a remotely operated vehicle (ROV) or drop-down video (DDV) will be carried out to identify substrate and sediment type, which will be followed by grab sampling at five stations.

All intertidal works will be undertaken on foot where conditions allow, and use of a small rigid inflatable boat (RIB) will be used where soft sediment prevents on-foot access. Subtidal grab sampling will be carried out at high tide, with a sampler deployed from the RIB.

The Applicant proposes to collect 51 grab samples taken across the intertidal and subtidal areas (see Table 1). The SI activities are expected to take 1-2 weeks to complete. For the purposes of MARA's assessment, the proposed SI activities have been assessed over a 12-month period to account for seasonal variability. All sampling effort proposed by the Applicant will occur within the Inner Dundalk Bay and Castletown estuaries.

Table 1: Summary of proposed site investigation activities, including survey phase, activities, sampling effort and indicative timeframes.

Survey Phase	Activity	Sampling Effort	Indicate Timeframe
Subtidal grab sampling.	Targeted subtidal benthic and sediment survey.	5 stations with 3 grab samples per station, resulting in 15 grab samples.	One - two weeks.
Phase I intertidal walkover survey.	Intertidal walkover survey.	Four shoreline sections (approximately 500 m each).	
Phase II Quantitative intertidal survey.	Intertidal benthic survey.	24 faunal grab samples and 12 sediment samples, resulting in 36 grab samples.	

2.1 Brief description of the site characteristics

The proposed MUL area covers 90.02 ha within the sheltered estuaries of Inner Dundalk Bay, Castletown and Ballymascanlan. The site lies adjacent to the townlands of Bellurgan to the northeast, Marsh North to the northwest, and Point to the south. Nearshore water depths are between 0-5 m.

The proposed MUL area falls within the Northeastern Irish Sea Islands and Beaches Seascape Character Type and the Broad Estuarine Bays and Complex Low Plateau and Cliff Coastline Seascape Character Area. The underlying geology comprises Silurian deep marine sedimentary rocks, including mudstone, conglomerate, greywacke, which extend offshore.

Sediment within the proposed MUL area is dominated by the Muddy fine sand community and Fine sand community complex. A substantial 1330 Atlantic salt meadow (*Glaucopuccinellietalia maritima*) habitat is found occurring in the southeast of the proposed MUL area with a smaller patch to the northwest. Also present within the proposed MUL area is 1310 *Salicornia* and other annuals colonising mud and sand.

3. Assessment

In assessing a MUL application, MARA must have regard to the criteria specified in the MAP Act, as discussed in this section.

3.1 National Marine Planning Framework (NMPF)

MARA must have regard to the Marine Planning Policy Statement (MPPS) which outlines the government's overarching vision, policies, and principles for managing the country's maritime area. MARA must also have regard to the NMPF, which sets the framework for implementing the forward planning component of our marine planning system as set out in the MPPS.

A number of environmental policies and legislative frameworks referenced within the NMPF are addressed elsewhere in this report (sections 3.3 – 3.6), including the National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP), the Birds and Habitats Directives, and the Water Framework Directive (WFD).

The proposed SI activities are considered consistent with several relevant sectoral policies of the NMPF, being most closely aligned with Chapter 24 – Wastewater Treatment and Disposal. The objectives of this chapter are to bring and maintain public water and wastewater services to acceptable international benchmarks and to support communities and sustainable development in coastal areas through the provision of resilient water services and infrastructure.

Notwithstanding, the proposed SI activities are also consistent with the following NMPF policies;

Environmental – Ocean Health: The NMPF requires that proposals protect and, where possible, enhance marine ecosystem health. The proposed SI activities are temporary in nature and not expected to result in significant impacts on the marine habitats and species within Dundalk Bay.

Environmental – Water Quality: The NMPF water quality policies seek to prevent deterioration in water quality, including waters of designated shellfish areas. The proposed SI activities are not expected to result in discharges or disturbance that would significantly affect water quality.

Economic – Thriving Maritime Economy: The NMPF supports the provision of infrastructure that helps sustainable economic development in coastal areas. The proposed SI activities are intended to inform the ecological conditions within the receiving environment before wastewater discharges from the Haggardstown and Marshes Upper Large-Scale Residential Development commence, a development which supports the future development of coastal communities.

Social – Co-existence: The NMPF supports the sustainable coexistence of multiple marine activities and seeks to minimise conflicts between users of the maritime area. The proposed SI activities are temporary and are not expected to adversely affect other marine users or restrict access to the maritime area.

Underwater Cultural Heritage.

The NMPF includes a policy on Heritage Assets, which supports the conservation of the historic environment and heritage assets both along the coast and in the underwater environment. The policy notes that proposals not specifically contributing to enhancing cultural heritage assets must demonstrate that they avoid, minimise or mitigate against harm to heritage assets.

Two recorded wrecks (W00274 and W00275, wreck names unknown) are located within the proposed MUL area. The nearest survey activity (Phase II; Intertidal Transect 2) is located approximately 46 m and 51 m from these recorded wreck sites, respectively.

Given the presence of recorded underwater cultural heritage assets within the proposed MUL area, it is recommended that a condition be included in any Licence granted requiring the Licence Holder to consult with the National Monuments Service (NMS) and the Underwater Archaeology Unit of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage prior to the commencement of the proposed SI activities. Any requirements relating to underwater cultural heritage should be complied with.

3.2 Environmental Impact Assessment Directive (2014/52/EU) (EIA Directive)

MARA carried out a screening for EIA of the proposed site investigations having considered Schedules 5 and 7 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001. An EIA Screening Form was issued by MARA on 29/09/2026 and it was concluded that the activities do not fall within the scope of the EIA Directive and therefore an EIA is not required.

3.3 National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP)

Ireland's 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan sets the national biodiversity agenda for the period 2023–2030. The objectives of the NBAP focus on the conservation and restoration of biodiversity. Objective 2 of the NBAP is to meet urgent conservation and restoration needs. Part of its focus is to elevate efforts to tackle invasive alien species. It is recommended that a condition be included in the Licence, if granted, to address the potential risks from invasive alien species as a result of the proposed SI activities.

3.4 Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015, as amended

Section 15(1) of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015, as amended (the 'Climate Act') requires relevant bodies, including MARA, to perform their functions insofar as practicable in a manner consistent with the governance framework set out therein. The Act sets legally binding targets for the reduction of greenhouse gases by 2030 and net-zero emissions by 2050.

The Louth County Council Climate Action Plan 2024-2029 and Climate Action Plan 2025 were reviewed in the context of the proposed SI activities. These plans set out objectives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, support climate change adaption, and facilitate the transition to a low-carbon and climate-resilient county.

Only minor emissions associated with shallow-draft vessel use for subtidal and potential intertidal sampling is anticipated. Other aspects of the proposed SI activities, including Phase I intertidal walkover survey, will not produce any emissions. Considering the temporary and small-scale nature of the proposed SI activities, no significant increase in greenhouse gas emissions is expected to arise from the proposed activities.

3.5 Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC)

The Water Framework Directive (WFD) requires EU member states to protect and improve water quality in all waters and to achieve at least good ecological status in inland surface waters, transitional waters, coastal waters and groundwater by 2027, at the latest.

The proposed SI works, comprising intertidal walkover surveys as well as intertidal and subtidal grab sampling, will take place within two transitional water bodies, namely Inner

Dundalk Bay (IE_NB_040_0100) and the Castletown Estuary (IE_NB_040_0200). The proposed MUL area also extends into the Ballymascanlan Estuary (IE_NB_040_0300); however, no SI works are proposed within this water body.

The principal pressures associated with these water bodies are nutrient enrichment and organic pollution¹. Ecological status is based on the assessment of biological quality elements (phytoplankton, benthic invertebrates, macroalgae, angiosperms), as well as supporting chemical (specific pollutants), physico-chemical (e.g. temperature, salinity, nutrients) and hydromorphological quality elements. The current ecological status and risk classification of these transitional water bodies are presented in Table 2.

It is recommended that any Licence granted include a condition requiring the Applicant to ensure that the vessel used during the proposed SI activities complies with Irish certification standards, as required by the Marine Survey Office.

Considering the short-term, localised, and low-intensity nature of the proposed SI activities, coupled with the limited disturbance footprint and the conditions recommended for inclusion in the Proposed Licence, the proposed SI activities are not expected to result in deterioration of the ecological status of the identified WFD transitional water bodies (Table 2), or compromise the achievement of WFD objectives.

Table 2: Water Framework Directive waterbodies in relation to MUL application areas from the reporting period 2019–2024, including status, risk and significant pressures for the at-risk waterbodies².

Waterbody name & code	Waterbody type	Ecological status & Risk	WFD significant pressures	Proposed activities within waterbody
Castletown Estuary (IE_NB_040_0200)	Transitional	Bad & At risk	Nutrient Pollution Impact & Organic Pollution Impact	Phase I Intertidal Walkover Survey (transect 1, 3 and 4); Phase II intertidal transects 1 and 4); 3x subtidal survey grab stations.
Inner Dundalk Bay (IE_NB_040_0100)	Transitional	Poor & At risk		Phase I Intertidal Walkover Survey (transect 2 and 3); Phase II intertidal transects (transects 2 and 3); 2x subtidal grab stations.
Ballymascanlan Estuary (IE_NB_040_0300)	Transitional	Moderate & Under review		No SI activities will take place in Ballymascanlan Estuary.

¹ [06 Newry, Fane, Glyde and Dee Catchment Summary WFD Cycle 3.pdf](#)

² From www.catchments.ie

3.6 Marine Strategy Framework Directive (2008/56/EC)

The Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) sets the framework for European marine environmental policy. It aims to achieve Good Environmental Status (GES) for all marine waters in Europe and protect the resource base for marine related economic and social activities. Ireland's 2024 assessment³ under Article 8 of the MSFD sets out the status of the 11 qualitative descriptors that describe the state of the marine environment.

The proposed MUL area is located entirely within transitional waters, namely the Inner Dundalk Bay, Castletown, and Ballymascanlan estuaries, therefore lying outside the spatial extent of Ireland's MSFD assessment area. Accordingly, assessment against MSFD descriptors is not applicable to the proposed SI activities.

3.7 Annex IV species

Articles 12 and 13 of the Habitats Directive (92/43/EC) impose obligations on Member States to establish a system of strict protection for animal and plant species listed on Annex IV of the Directive.

National guidance on the management of the risk to marine mammals from underwater noise requires a risk assessment of the potential impacts of man-made sound sources. To this end, the Applicant submitted an Annex IV risk assessment in support of their application.

The proposed SI activities will involve short-term (indicative duration of one to two weeks), localised survey works. No excavating, drilling, or dredging is proposed. Vessel use will be limited to a small RIB (8-12 m in length) operating at low speed associated with subtidal and potentially intertidal sampling, with vessel noise restricted to low-level sampling activities. The risk of collision associated with vessel movements is considered low.

Recent National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC) and National Parks Wildlife Service (NPWS) records confirm the presence of otter (*Lutra lutra*) within the wider Dundalk Bay and Castletown Estuary area. No otter holts, couches, or breeding/resting sites have been identified within or adjacent to the proposed MUL area. Otter use of the area is likely limited to shoreline foraging and commuting between freshwater and coastal habitats. Therefore, injury or disturbance to otter breeding or resting sites are not considered likely.

The shallow, highly tidal, and predominantly intertidal nature of Inner Dundalk Bay provides unsuitable habitat for bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*), particularly for feeding or regular use. Recent NBDC data indicate no records within Inner Dundalk Bay, with the nearest sightings recorded ~ 9 km from the proposed MUL area. While occasional use of the proposed MUL area cannot be excluded, regular occurrence is considered unlikely.

³ [Ireland's Marine Strategy Part 1: Article 8, 9 and 10 report 2024.](#)

Although harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*) is widespread in Irish waters, the shallow and extensive drying nature of Inner Dundalk Bay limits habitat suitability for this species, and regular occurrence within the proposed MUL area is considered unlikely.

Minke whale (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*), short-beaked common dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*), killer whale (*Orcinus orca*) and leatherback turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*) are not expected to occur within the proposed MUL area given the scale and duration of the proposed SI activities.

Bat habitat-suitability mapping has identified a moderate suitability index for the proposed MUL area. Considering the nature of the SI activities, bats will not be significantly disturbed.

Annex IV species are unlikely to occur within the proposed MUL area, and the proposed SI activities are not expected to cause disturbance at a level which would affect these species, as such, significant disturbance of Annex IV species is not considered likely.

The applicant has stated that a derogation licence from the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) under the (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 as amended, is not required for the proposed site investigations.

3.8 Appropriate Assessment Screening

The Habitats Directive (92/43/EC) and the Birds Directive (2009/147/EC) are transposed into Irish law by the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011, as amended (the Regulations) and by Part XAB of the Planning and Development Act 2000. The application was subject to screening for appropriate assessment (AA) by MARA in accordance with the Regulations.

MARA made an Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening Determination on 29/09/2026 which concluded that the proposed SI activities will not require Stage 2 AA as it could be excluded, on the basis of objective scientific information, that the proposed project, either individually or in-combination with other plans or projects, will have a significant effect on European sites.

4. Consideration of other maritime users

MARA has had regard to the rights of other users as set out in Section 3 (3)(b) of the MAP Act. Although the proposed SI activity is short-term and temporary in nature, specific conditions will be included in any maritime usage licence granted to cover the consideration of other users of the licenced area, particularly regarding the publication of Marine Notices and navigation safety. In addition, the users below were considered in more detail.

4.1 Commercial Vessels

The proposed MUL area supports relatively low levels of commercial vessel traffic. While significant levels of commercial vessel use occur within the wider Irish Sea, particularly in Carlingford Lough to the north, vessel activity within the proposed MUL area itself is limited. Recorded vessel traffic comprises low levels of cargo service vessel traffic (approximately two hours per km² per month), with no significant tanker, passenger, tug, towing, fishing, dredging, sailing, pleasure craft, or high-speed vessel activity recorded.

The proposed MUL area lies within the Dundalk Port Company Pilotage Limit and adjacent to Dundalk Port, a National Ferry Trade Port. However, given the temporary and limited nature of the proposed SI activities, no impacts on commercial navigation or port operations are anticipated.

It is recommended that a condition be included in any Licence granted to arrange for the publication of a Marine Notice with the Port of Dundalk Harbour Master prior to works commencing. Additionally, a condition will be included requiring the Holder to avoid damage to, or interference with, third-party property, while carrying out the SI activities.

4.2 Commercial Fisheries

The proposed MUL area does not overlap with any commercial inshore fishing grounds or licensed aquaculture sites. No significant Irish or international fishing effort, including trawling, dredging, netting, lining, or pot fishing, has been identified within the proposed MUL area.

Commercial fisheries of relevance within the wider Irish Sea include razor clam, seed mussel, and scallop dredge fisheries; however, these occur more than 17 km south-east of the proposed MUL area and are not expected to be impacted by the proposed SI activities. The nearest licensed aquaculture sites are located approximately 10 km north in Carlingford Lough.

The proposed MUL area overlaps with cod and whiting spawning grounds and cod, haddock, horse mackerel, and mackerel nursery grounds. No overlap occurs with other identified nursery or spawning grounds, including herring, blue whiting, hake, megrim, monkfish, or Nephrops.

Given the small spatial footprint, short duration of the proposed activities and limited predicted ecological effects, significant impacts on commercial fisheries, spawning grounds, or nursery areas are not anticipated. No fisheries-specific licence conditions are considered necessary.

4.3 Recreational Users

Recreational use of the proposed MUL area is limited, with no significant beach-based recreation and only low levels of maritime activity. The nearest bathing waters are located at Templetown, approximately 14 km from the proposed MUL area.

The limited extent and duration of the proposed SI activities are not expected to affect recreational beach use, fishing, or sailing. The presence of a single survey vessel is unlikely to interfere with other recreational marine users.

Overall, no significant impacts on recreational users are anticipated.

5. Site visit

No site visit was undertaken due to limited potential for significant impacts to the site.

6. Public body consultation

Observations on the MUL application were invited from relevant public bodies to ensure that MARA takes account of all other relevant maritime usages and interests in the application area. Two responses were received. The following table summarises the observations from the public bodies with a response given below the submission summary. The MARA website should be consulted to view the full details of the observations received.

1. Observations summary – Marine Survey Office (MSO), Department of Transport.
Observations were received on 23/09/2026 from the Marine Survey Office (MSO), Department of Transport. The MSO has no objection to the proposed SI activities from a navigational safety perspective. The MSO note that; • The Applicant should engage with the Local County Authority to determine whether any hazards such as submarine pipelines or cables are present. • The Applicant should publish a Local Notice to Mariners. • The Applicant should ensure that safety of navigation is maintained. • The Applicant should consult with the MSO and Commissioners of Irish Lights if using moored instruments. Information on moored instruments should be published via Marine Notice. • The Applicant should ensure that vessels conform to Irish Licence and Certification standards and are manned by qualified personnel. • All bathymetry data to be shared with UKHO and INFOMAR.

MARA Response:

MARA notes the response of the MSO. A condition relating to the publication of a Marine Notice and compliance with Irish vessel licensing and certification requirements will be

included in any Licence issued. In addition, all MULs include standard conditions stating that the Licence does not negate the Holder's statutory obligations or requirements under any other enactment or legal requirement.

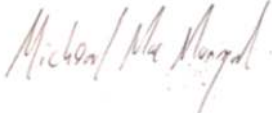
2. Observations summary – Commissioners of Irish Lights. Observations were received on 28/09/2026 from the Commissioners of Irish Lights. The Commissioners of Irish Lights have no objection to the proposed SI activities from a navigational safety perspective and does not consider that any aids to navigation are required. Irish Lights recommends that the Applicant consult with Dundalk Port prior to work commencing.
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MARA Response:

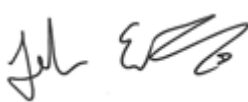
MARA notes the response of the Commissioners of Irish Lights. A condition will be included in any Licence granted requiring the Applicant to consult with the Port of Dundalk Harbour Master to plan and schedule the SI activities to ensure that any potential disruption to port operations is managed.

7. Recommendation

Having considered the information submitted in support of the application, and the criteria specified in the Maritime Area Planning Act 2021, as amended, I recommend that a Maritime Usage Licence in accordance with Section 119 of the Maritime Area Planning Act, 2021, as amended, be granted to Marina Quarter Ltd., Block C, Maynooth Business Campus, Straffan Road, Maynooth, Kildare, W23F854, for the purposes of marine environmental surveys for the purposes of site investigation or in support of an application under Part XXI of the Act of 2000, subject to the conditions in the Proposed Licence and for a duration of one year.

Signed:	
Prepared by:	Dr. Micheál Mac Monagail Marine Analyst
Date:	29/09/2026

8. Approval

Signed:	
Approved by:	John Evans Director of Maritime Usage Licensing
Date:	30/09/2026